

# **Social Policy among Politicians: on the Eve of the Early Elections**

*(By Yaroslav Varyvoda, UCIPR project expert)*

The social issue is always widely used by all political forces during election campaigns. Though, on the eve of the early parliamentary elections in September 2007, it has become a key one on the agenda of leaders of the electoral race. Election programs are full of social promises. Indicative is the situation with the commitment of parties and blocs to pay child allowance (the highest stake was made by the Party of Regions ranging from UAH 10,000 for the first child to UAH 50,000 for the third child). Furthermore, politicians suggest increasing pensions (Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc), raising the minimum wage (Our Ukraine-People's Self-Defense) and providing young specialists and budget employees with housing (the Party of Regions).

In its turn, the IMF forecasts that the focus on guaranteed social payments, which became a usual practice of almost all Ukrainian political forces, might lead to the essential growth of both prices for all commodity groups and the national budget deficit.

By the way, however strange it seems but the Ukrainian law does not give a clear definition for "social policy". The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy as a respective body in the executive system is responsible for the implementation of government policy "in the area of employment and labor migration, social security of the population, state compulsory social insurance, social-labor relations and control of compliance with the legislation on labor, payment, work measurement and promotion, classification of jobs and trades, labor conditions, pension security, social services, collective and contractual regulation of socio-economic interests of workers and employers and development of a social dialogue" (the November 2, 2006 Cabinet resolution No. 1543 "On the Approval of the Regulation on the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of Ukraine"). Under the Ukrainian law, social security shall be ensured "by means of timely and address social support, including all types of public social assistance in case of the loss of job, disability, retirement age and others" (the November 2, 2006 Cabinet resolution No. 1543 "On the Approval of the Regulation on the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of Ukraine").

## **Social Policy as Seen by MPs...**

Legislative activity of parliamentary factions is focused mostly on the satisfaction of needs of social groups that serve as a basis for their voters. Specifically, lawmaking initiatives of the Communist Party's faction mainly concern veterans, pensioners and children of war. MPs from the faction of the Party of Regions basically deal with state compulsory social insurance, which is probably interesting for wage earners and employers. Another aspect of law-making incorporates problems relating to consistent and sound policy of political parties. An indicative example is Our Ukraine, whose deputies members of respective committees drafted just 3 bills. Another example is Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc, whose legal initiatives on social security of the disabled are launched by its new member MP V. Sushkevych, who has been engaged in respective problems for long.

A comparative analysis of the declared commitments and the scope of activities carried out over the year evidences that the most effective were efforts of coalition party forces (first and foremost, the Party of Regions and the Communist Party), which worked on legislative regulation of such issues as state compulsory social insurance and social security of the disabled and pensioners. For a number of reasons, activity of the parliamentary opposition was oriented towards other areas of government policy, whereas work in the social sphere proved to be ineffective.

Attention must be paid to low effectiveness of social law-making of MPs from the faction of Our Ukraine – they submitted only 3 bills, of which none has been enacted (by the way, according to information posted on the official site of the Verkhovna Rada, this political force appointed just by 1 MP to sit in respective committees). Eventually, in 2006, Our Ukraine went to the elections with liberal views and did not undertake high obligations on social security of Ukrainians, having limited its program to general declarations.

MPs from the faction of Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc paid attention to bills on youth social protection, child allowance, various aspects of social assistance to the disabled etc. For some reasons, among which the faction's being in opposition is not the last one, this work is characterized by the low performance factor, since the parliament supported just 4 bills, inclusive of the Recommendations of the Parliamentary Hearings on the Youth Situation and amendments to the three laws.

The Communist Party has a rather high level of law-making due to activity of MP P. Tsybenko, who performed the Stakhanov's norm having submitted 61 bills, of which 35 directly deal with the social issues. 6 bills became normative documents, to say nothing about a number of resolutions on the withdrawal of some bills and the adoption of others as a basis. In general, Mr. Tsybenko concerned himself with social security of the disabled, pensioners and war veterans, which is in line with the Communist Party's election platform and confirms its orientation to these categories of voters. On the other hand, it is rather surprising that the Communist Party delegated just one deputy to tackle such an important matter as social policy.

Having appointed its three representatives as members of special parliamentary committees, the Socialist Party also can boast about work of only one deputy, I. Bondarchuk (59 bills, of which 26 concern social policy). Nevertheless, effectiveness of the Socialists in the area of social security was low, for most bills are not enacted, whereas the adopted ones concern procedural issues (the approval as a basis, defeat, revision etc.).

As for the Party of Region's faction, a major share of respective work of its MPs related to state social insurance (10 respective bills were voted for at once).

The government's efforts in the social sphere usually become more active over the election period (this means attempts of a certain political force to prove the fulfillment of its commitments and widen the circle of supporters).

Vision of "social policy" by key political forces of Ukraine is full of populism. The Communists and the Socialists address mostly their voters (pensioners, veterans,

children of war and others), the Party of Regions and Our Ukraine guarantee the government support only to those, who cannot care about themselves, whereas Yulia Tymoshenko's Bloc promise to combat total injustice and ensure equal rights to all citizens without exception.

*This article is prepared within the framework of UCIPR project "Civic Education in the 2007 Parliamentary Elections". The bulletin is "Your Vote-2007". Issue 6. "Social Policy: Vision and Practice of Ukrainian Political Forces, Represented in the Verkhovna Rada of the Vth Convocation" is available on the UCIPR's site <http://www.ucipr.kiev.ua>.*

*This article was published and translated into English in the framework of the "Increasing Institutional and Program Capacity/2006-2007" Project of the Open Society Institute Zug Foundation.*

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